

September 13, 1962

Memorandum on Cuba for the press conference

Background

1. The Congressional head of steam on this is the most serious that we have had. ~~In particular~~, it affects both parties and takes many forms.

2. The immediate hazard is that the Administration may appear to be weak and indecisive.

3. One way to avoid this hazard is to act by naval or military force in the Cuban area. If that is planned, the rest of this memorandum is irrelevant.

4. The other course is to make a very clear and aggressive explanation of current policy and of its justification.

5. An outline of possible elements in such an explanation follows. They can be cut and spliced as the President decides.

a. The threat is under control

Neither Communist propaganda nor our own natural anger should blind us to the basic fact that Cuba is not -- and will not be allowed to become -- a threat to the United States.

b. The real balance of power in the Caribbean

As a military problem, the Cuban situation is and will remain entirely within our control. Neither as a defended outpost nor as a base for aggressive adventure could it survive more than a few days if serious action became necessary (a review of contingent military plans for Cuba makes it clear that the latest arrivals would not change the outcome of a real military engagement by more than 24 hours of extra air war).

c. Our watchfulness and alertness

The American people can be confident in the accuracy and completeness of our information on the situation in Cuba.

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Government information has been more prompt and more accurate than any privately circulated rumors throughout recent months. This surveillance will continue and will be increased as necessary.

d. The nonsense of invasion

^{W.L.} can denounce as ridiculous Communist propaganda which asserts that there is an imminent threat of U. S. invasion of Cuba. We can also describe as irresponsible any talk of this kind in this country. Such talk plays into Castro's hands. It is not -- and it will not be -- the U. S. who puts the peace of the Caribbean in jeopardy.

e. What the Monroe Doctrine is and is not

The Monroe Doctrine justifies vigilance; it justifies readiness to take any action that may become necessary to protect the hemisphere. But it does not justify acts of irresponsible anger which would damage the interests of the United States both around the world and within the hemisphere. Moreover, the Monroe Doctrine has changed in two major ways since the time of Monroe:

(1) It was announced in terms which excluded U. S. interest in the Old World. That part of the Doctrine is obviously changed, and what we do in this hemisphere must now be related to our interests and commitments around the world.

(2) Under the Rio Treaty of 1947, the Monroe Doctrine has been widened to include multilateral obligations. We have the strength and will to act alone if we must, but the better course is to act together, and it is well to remember that the language of the Rio Treaty formally forbids unilateral military action except in response to armed attack.

f. We should keep the spotlight on Castro's internal failure. The Castro regime is increasingly isolated. These new actions have removed it further than ever from the family of freedom and hope which is the American system. Its political tyranny is now as plain as its sweeping economic and social failure. As the people of Cuba increasingly recognize and resist this betrayal, they will have friendship and help from all over the hemisphere. This is the real threat to Castro and he cannot defend himself against it by missiles aimed at a non-existent invader.

g. The larger issues are as wide as the hemisphere. The dismal isolated and feeble failure in Cuba is not the real focus of the western hemisphere. It is the policy of the U.S. to continue to be aimed at the wider purpose of defending and advancing the hopes of all Americans, north and south.

h. In this situation there is no need for a new Congressional authorization, although bipartisan support is always welcome. Some Members of Congress appear to believe that special authorization is desirable to give the President authority to deal with Castro. The President's view is this. Under the Constitution he already has the authority which he needs, and he will use it when and as he needs to. He is confident that in this most serious matter the American people will not want national policy framed by any partisan resolutions, but if the leaders of both parties in the Congress should think it useful and timely to renew, in the present situation, general authorization of the sort which General Eisenhower thought desirable in Formosa in 1955 and in the Middle East in 1957, the President will welcome their support. With or without such a resolution, he will carry out his responsibilities as President and Commander-in-Chief.

McG. B.